



BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

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Baptism - Water, Wind, Fire and Earth

Acts 8:14-39

Luke 3:15-22

~ **Brent Russell** ~

- The set readings for today are all about **Baptism**
- We find ourselves on the **banks of the river Jordan**
- **Crowds of Jews** are milling about waiting to be baptised by John
- **We see the Baptist** - John baptizing people in the river for the repentance of sins
- But some of the people begin to wonder "**Could he be the one who is to come?**"
- And seeing them all John cries out "**One is coming who is greater than me. I baptize with water, he will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire**"
- And so I want us to look at baptism and some ideas around this profound Christian rite
- Let me set the scene a little by asking you talk amongst yourselves for a moment and discuss these questions:

1. What does baptism mean?
2. What then actually happens at baptism?
3. Are we saved by baptism?

- **Any takers on what the word baptism means?**
- Literally it means to be **overwhelmed or fully wet**
- In fact the *Greeks* used this word when you **dyed a garment**
- They would soak a linen cloth in a vat containing some pigment and then after some time the garment would be permanently coloured by the dye
- And so when we baptise something we are immersing it into something
- **Soaked** in it
- It **infuses** into us
- It **permanently colours** us
- **And with our baptism that is exactly what happens**
- Now there are clearly two baptisms spoken of in the scriptures
- **Firstly there is a baptism into the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit**
- **Secondly there is a baptism with the holy Spirit**
- And I want us to look at these two baptisms
- I want to develop and unpack some ideas with you around baptism so that we can once again understand *God's grace*

Baptism by Water

- At the end of *Matthews Gospel* in chapter 28 Jesus commands us with the words of the **great commission**
- **"Go and make disciples of all nations Baptising them in the name of the father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"**
- And so this is what we do
- **When people have understood the gospel and want to become part of the church**
- The **minister** of the church baptises you with water
- Either as an adult or a child
- The minister baptises you with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
- It has been **the rite of initiation** into the church since the very beginning of the Christian church
- By this baptism you are **incorporated into the body of Christ**
- You are baptised and brought into the life of the church
- In one way our lives are literally **soaked in the Christian ethos** of the church
- You are **literally saturated in Christian teaching and Christian thinking**
- As our **parents** fulfil their promises and bring up their children to love Jesus
- **We soak up Christian thought, Christian morality and a Christian way of life**
- **But what happens at our baptism**
- **Does something spiritual happen**
- **Or is this merely a symbolic act?**
- In the same way that circumcision brought one into the covenant
- **So baptism includes us into the covenant of God**
- Paul writes in *Colossians 2:11* "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

- **Paul equates circumcision in the old covenant with baptism in the new covenant**
- Whilst we are still infants unknowing and without understanding God includes us in his promises
- **We die in Christ through Baptism and so receive the promise that when we come to faith we will be raised with Him**
- We receive ALL the promises given to the church
- We are immediately recipients of the promises everything God has promised
- One of the nicest presents to receive is a **gift voucher**
- Something nice like a **Tiger Valley** voucher is always nice
- Or perhaps a **Woolies** voucher
- Something that someone gives us that promises us that we can get something
- **At our Baptism God gives us a redeemable voucher**
- **If you remember the older South African money notes had a promissory note on them**
- Something to the effect of I promise to pay the bearer the sum of R10
- **At our Baptism God by his grace gives to us a voucher that promises to us eternal life**
- **Salvation, sanctification glory**
- **This voucher promises to us everything**

- **We just have to cash it in**
- As we are baptised into Jesus death we are given all the promises
- **As we come to faith in Him we receive the fullness of them**

- One of the **saddest stories** I recall was of a man in New York
- He was well known in his community as a dustbin man
- Spending his days searching through other peoples rubbish looking for things of worth

- He died one day of malnutrition
- And in the money belt on his waist he had \$32 000
- If we are Baptised but never understand that Jesus died for us
- We walk around with this voucher in our pockets
- The promises of God - but we never cash it

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

- **But there is a second baptism that we too may share in**
- **Apart from our coming to faith in Jesus as Lord**
- In the same way that in our baptism by water we are incorporated into the life of the church and we are immersed in it
- soaked in it
- **There is another baptism that we also may be immersed in**
- John the Baptist tell the people: says in Luke's gospel that One who is greater will come and he will baptise with the **Holy Spirit and with fire**
- **And in this baptism of the Spirit we are soaked in the Spirit**
- **Immersed in the Holy Spirit**
- **Like a garment soaked in red dye picks up the colour of the dye**
- As we allow ourselves to be baptised by the Spirit we are **stained by him**
- **Coloured by the Spirit of the Living God**
- **When Jesus baptizes us with His Spirit**
- **He does come with fire**
- The metaphor of fire has always been used to symbolise **judgement or purification**
- If we read the book of **Malachi** the last book in the OT
- We see the author writing of the refiners fire purifying us like Gold out of a lump of ore
- **Burning off the rubbish of our lives**

- **When we are Baptized by the Holy Spirit he comes with fire**
- **When we are baptised by the Holy Spirit we are given a renewed understanding of our unworthiness, our sinfulness**
- **The Holy Spirit convicts us of our need of a saviour in a powerfully, profoundly fresh way when we are baptized by Him**
- **And the Holy Spirit continues his work by colouring our thoughts**
- **Our attitudes**
- **Our very way of thinking**
- **Our way of life**
- **As we are immersed in the Holy Spirit he colours our thoughts, opinions ways of thinking to be more and more like Jesus**
- **In fact Paul writes of this to the Colossian and the Corinthian churches telling them you are being renewed inwardly day by day**
- **As we are immersed in the Spirit our minds are renewed**
- **Literally the Holy Spirit stains our thinking to think like Jesus**
- **The baptism with the Spirit is something done by Jesus**
- **It is not something that someone can do or give to you as is Baptism into the name of Jesus**
- **When we are Baptised into the name of The father, son and Holy Spirit it is the minister who baptises**
- **But a minister no matter how Spirit Filled himself cannot give you the Baptism of the Holy Spirit**
- **It is something that is a simple act of God's grace in our lives**
- **But we can desire to be baptized with the Holy Spirit**
- **We must desire and pray for Gods to baptise us with His Holy spirit**
- **We must petition God with our prayers seeking his grace to be poured out on us**
- **And even once we have been baptised in the Spirit we must continue to ask God to refill us again and again**

- **There was a church in the Bible belt down south in the states**
- And in the congregation then was a man who loved to tipple
- And week after week he would spend most of Friday and Saturday in oblivion
- And then on Sunday he would be in church bleary eyed
- And every Sunday during the time of prayer he would cry out "Lord fill me with your spirit"
- One Sunday one of the more pious members of the church blurted out after his prayer
- **"Don't listen Lord he Leaks!"**
- **The reality is that we are all like sieves - We leak**
- We need not only to seek the Baptism of the Spirit
- But we need to continue to petition God to refill us again and again
- **It needs to be a constant cry of our hearts**
- **Lord fill me again**
- **Fill me again**
- There are those who have been baptised by a minister into the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit
- They have received ALL the promises from God
- They have been given the voucher...but they forget to ever cash it in
- They fail to understand for themselves that Jesus is Lord of All
- They have the promise of eternal life - but they never claim the promise for themselves
- There are those too who have been baptized and who know Jesus as their Lord and saviour
- But they have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit
- They are saved - they have eternal life
- They have the guarantee of God's eternal life - but they have not understood that they need to be baptised by the Spirit of God

- They have yet to experience the blessing, gifts and fruits of the Spirit that God desires to pour out on them
- They have yet to immerse themselves in the Holy Spirit

Conclusion

- In early pagan cultures there was a belief about stuff
- About matter
- That all things were made up of four constituent elements
- Water, Wind, fire and earth
- Four elements out of which all other stuff was made
- And as strange as it may seem our baptism is very similar
- Water, wind, fire and earth
- We need them all to understand our baptism
- We are baptised with **water** receiving all the promises given by God
- We are baptised by the **wind** and by **fire** - God's holy spirit the breath of God
- And finally in death - once we are returned to the **earth**
- Only then do we receive the fullness of our baptism
- We are then resurrected
- We are glorified
- **Water, wind fire and earth**
- Our being brought into the church
- Our blessing and purification by the spirit of God
- And finally our death in which we receive the fullness of the promises given to us at our baptism